

TRAUMA & SPIRITUALITY



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# The Impact of Trauma on One's Spirituality and the Self



# About Me

Debra Kine is the Director of the CTAP/TPIP Program and the Spiritual Care Program at Edgewood. She has been with Edgewood for twelve years and her previous work includes grief counselling, spiritual care as a chaplain, and counselling in pediatrics ICU, emergency care, HIV/oncology, and palliative care. Her experience working at St. Mike's Hospital, a major trauma hospital in Toronto, had a substantial impact on her career.

She received her degrees from McMaster University and the University of Toronto. She received her trauma training from Bessel Van der Kolk and continues her studies with him today. She has also studied with Janina Fisher, Stephen Porges, and Peter Levine.

Debra is passionate about the effects of trauma on one's spirituality and identity. She knows that PTSD can cause us to separate from the essence of who we are. However, her recovery from PTSD has demonstrated to her that healing is possible.

She is an avid nature lover, horseback rider, and dog lover. She likes to hike and bike around the beautiful British Columbia landscapes in her spare time.





# What is Spirituality?



There are many definitions and perspectives about what exactly is spirituality. For this presentation, I define spirituality as, the essence of our true nature.

It's who we are, it's our culture, the environment we grow up in, our beliefs, our values, our desires, our sense of self, and it gives meaning to our life.

# "The true inner self...

...must be drawn up like a jewel from the bottom of the sea, rescued from confusion, from indistinction, from immersion in the common, the nondescript, the trivial, the sordid, the evanescent."

-Thomas Merton



# *One's Spirituality...*

Is woven into and expressed through every thought,  
feeling, and behaviour that we show to the world.

We demonstrate these expressions through our connection to others,  
to nature, to animals, and the world.

It nourishes our motivation and willpower that assist in our drive to  
keep going and to stay committed even when we don't want to.



# Trauma

**There are many definitions and perspectives in regards to trauma.**

**What is trauma?**

Is it an event, a series of events, a violent act? What is it?

**Trauma is a wound.**

When it happens, it creates a raw hurt that causes pain. It is an overwhelming experience that affects the entire being and continues to keep that person stuck in the past.

As Janina Fisher states,

**"It becomes one's living legacy that keeps on giving."**

Trauma is relative -- what is traumatizing to one person may not be traumatizing to another.

**What is traumatic depends on our vulnerability.**



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"Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: the past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves."

-Bessel Van der Kolk



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# The Impact of Trauma on the Spiritual Self

When trauma happens, it creates a disconnect from the mind and the body.

The person loses the essence of who they truly are. It instills fear in the person. They no longer feel safe, they lose trust, and most importantly they lose their sense of purpose.

When trauma happens, the person begins to feel a lot of shame and forms a negative core belief about themselves that says:

"I am not loveable, I can't do anything right, I am a mistake, I'm a monster...."



# The Impact of Trauma on the Spiritual Self

Continued...

The person's language becomes a language of negativity, a language of despair, a language of hopelessness that eventually leads them to thinking they and everyone around them would be better off if they were not around.

So they start building walls to push people away because they believe they don't belong anymore and if people knew who they "really" were, no one would like or accept them. They start to wear masks such as: the conformist, the competitor, indecisive, the procrastinator, the caretaker, etc. to prove to themselves and others that they are worthy.

However, this creates a cycle of chaos, that leads to a spiral of comparing themselves to others, questioning their decisions, and their ability to care for themselves.

Their nervous system becomes unbalanced, they live in sympathetic until their nervous system is exhausted and then they eventually find themselves in dorsal.

Their thoughts are of:

**I can't take this anymore, relief will only come when I die.**

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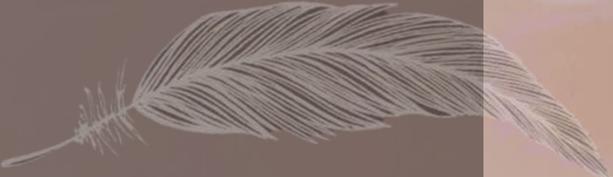
# How do we help?

How do we as trauma counsellors help these people restore their faith in themselves, guide them to reconnecting the essence (spirituality) of who they were born to be, and answer the question:

**"Who am I?"**



# The Trauma Programs at Edgewood



The trauma programs at Edgewood are based on approaching spirituality and trauma at the same time. We believe that trauma can be a gateway to a new path of life. Some of the clients that come to our program have commented that "trauma" was the best thing that happened to them because it forced them to re-evaluate their lives and take a hard look at themselves.

We help them go into the felt sense of the trauma using modalities such as: sensorimotor therapy, somatic therapy, body awareness/movement, reflection, contemplation, and we teach them how to be self-compassionate, which is very foreign to them, and they usually find this to be the most challenging. Their feelings of shame, anger, and fear are approached in a very compassionate and loving manner because we all know until the person feels safe they will not allow themselves to relax, let down their walls, take off their masks, and allow us (counsellors) to guide them to discover and explore the essence of their being.

We help them surrender to the pain and suffering.

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# Exploring Trauma



Exploring trauma can yield significant growth. It can be a way of suffering into truth.

Trauma either leads one into the truth or blocks a person from the truth.

There is wisdom in the disconnection because it was unbearable to be connected when the person was not being supported. When trauma happens we lose the essence of who we are. This creates a "missing piece" and as Gabor Mate states, "we try to fill it up with compensatory mechanisms called personalities."

Research tells us that a lot of organizations take the spiritual out of trauma and medicalize it.

Spirituality is not yet widely accepted in the medical field where they separate the mind from the body. Healing from trauma can only happen when compassion is present.

A person's sense of self expands beyond the little personality. There is more to us than physical and psychological boundaries.

Four virtues of spirituality?

**Hope, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion.**

Through one's suffering they have the potential of discovering a deeper connection to themselves.



"Healing from trauma can only happen when compassion is present."



# *The Spiritual Journey*

Once on the spiritual journey, the person with the help of their counsellor learns that the self they have presented to the world has been built around their patterns and behaviours that were formed as a child in order to survive.

These patterns and behaviours become so engrained in the psyche that they and others believe this is their true self. These patterns leave deep impressions that form a consciousness that gets misinterpreted as the true self. Then they believe this is their identity.

The ego develops in the first few years of life. The deep suffering forms very deep impressions in their consciousness and can only be reached by using compassion, mindfulness, and having a therapist who is very aware of who they are and have walked through their own trauma and the dark night of the soul.

Only  
compassion  
will the  
become

when  
is present  
person  
vulnerable.





Thank you!

Any Questions?



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